

wanted to dissolve it. When the results of the election became known, they launched a campaign to discredit the Assembly. It was molded, they told the people, after the pattern of parliamentary institutions of capitalist countries. Its convocation was a proper aim of a bourgeois revolution, but Russia had reached a higher stage of revolutionary development and there was no place for a Constituent Assembly in that exalted society! Furthermore, they argued, the elections had been held too early, before people had had time to get acquainted with the new regime and realize all its advantages.

The next step of the Council of People's Commissars was to raid the offices of the Union for Defense of the Assembly. Some thirty men, all moderate Socialists, were arrested and taken to the Fortress of Peter and Paul.

The day of the Assembly's opening arrived. The S-D and S-R had planned demonstrations in the streets and in front of the Tauride Palace. The government announced that drastic measures would be taken against such demonstrations. The Assembly convened in the Tauride Palace on January 18, 1918, at four o'clock. Doors and windows of the palace bristled with machine guns. Katherine Hall was packed with soldiers, sailors, and armed workers. The galleries were full of armed men. The aisles and the space behind the deputies' seats were occupied by Kronstadt sailors, hand-picked as guards of the Assembly. Many seats of deputies were empty, mute reminders of people's representatives held behind bars.

The Communists announced to the Assembly that its only task was to dissolve itself, with a declaration that it recognized the new government and all its decisions. But the majority of the Assembly was not inclined to act as a rubber stamp. Chernov was elected chairman of the Assembly by a two-thirds majority, amid stormy protests of the mob representing the public. Noisy demonstrations, threats, clicking of guns in the galleries and the aisles continued during discussion of the question of whether the representatives of the people should yield to the government or the government should yield to the will of the people. This was a continuation of the dispute between the Second Duma and Stolypin in Tsarist days. Again, as a decade earlier, Tseretelli spoke for the democratic sector of the Assembly. He was met with a furious barrage of taunts and threats, and his speech was interrupted at every sentence. He spoke facing rifles pointed at him. Then the frenzy began to subside and the armed mob listened to the last part of his speech in tense silence.

Addressing himself to the left wing of the Assembly, Tseretelli called on the new government to yield power to the Constituent Assembly. "Not only the experiments you describe as socialistic but the very fate of the Russian revolution are at stake. For eight months,